

## **PANEL DISCUSSION:** **Effective Bullying Intervention**

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### **Abstract**

*This panel discussion was one of the sessions in the International Multidisciplinary Perspective Research in Education and Social Sciences (IMPRESS21) conference that took place on 7-9 September 2021. The panel discussion focused on the concept of bullying, various types of bullying, awareness of bullying among children, the role of different contenders in bullying, and effective prevention strategies for bullying problems. The panel members were Professor Sefa Bulut (Ibn Haldun University, Başakşehir, Istanbul, Turkey) whose work focuses on the trauma and school violence relationship. The second panelist was Assistant Prof. Thseen Nazir (Ibn Haldun University, Başakşehir, Istanbul, Turkey), whose specialization focus on school bullying, role of different contenders and culture in bullying behavior, and prevention studies and the third panelist was Assistant Prof. Nadire Yıldız (Istanbul Medipol University) whose research interest focuses on mentorship programs with at-risk youth as a preventive intervention strategy. The panel discussion provided a conceptualization and understanding of bullying concepts and their prevention for school-age children. The panelists provided some insight into the nature of bullying, the underlying problems, causes, and consequences of the problems, and the effective prevention and evidence-based prevention programs for school-age children.*

**Keywords:** *Bullying; causes of bullying; prevention of bullying; mentorship programs for bullying*

### **1. Introduction**

In recent decades, peer bullying has been very popular concepts in schools and in research arena. There have been a lot of new publications about bullying. The concept first brought attention by Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus who was invited by school to observe the problems in school settings. He was the first author identified the term of “bullying” and listed some characteristics which are, intentional and systematic act of bothering someone who is not able to defend himself and there is power inequality among the parties. There are bully, victim, bystander and bully-victim in the bullying situations. They usually chose a new member, physically weak or physically different member, or culturally different students as a victim. It is very interesting that bullying is observed from kindergarten to adult life, in every level of education and even in adult work place.

Research shows that peer bullying is very common among all cultures and countries. The reported ranged changed from 10 to 40 % depending on the country and measurement instrument. While early research mostly focused on prevalence rates, epidemiology, effort to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon etc., in the last decades there are

meta-analysis studies conducted with this accumulated literature. Recent studies mostly focused on quasi-experimental designs, systematic literature review, qualitative studies prevalence studies, survey studies and some longitudinal studies. Now, we very well know the bullying concept, researchers are working on most effective preventive and intervention studies which many promising studies show up in recent literature.

Bullying may last within a couple of days to longer terms, years. Thus, it has very detrimental negative effects on children and students. Bullying may cause, depression, anxiety, absenteeism, delinquency, psychosomatic problems, social isolation, low achievement scores and low motivation for school, even it may cause death or suicide. It is sad that children who are exposed to bullying may ashamed of that and will not tell anyone. They will not seek help from teacher, counselor or they will not tell their parents instead they turn in side and develop more negative feelings, anxiety and depression and they will not enjoy the school life that their counterparts deeply enjoy it. It may have a lifelong effect on individual personal and academic life.

At the same time the bully perpetrators are themselves victim as such that they will seek acceptance and social prestige from their friends. Bullying may cause a vicious cycle that, victims develop more aggressive style and they, themselves become bully. Therefore, it is very important to develop awareness among school age children and take preventive measures. Certain school districts are more at risk than others for example, poor neighborhoods, inner cities and crowded schools are more vulnerable than others. In those schools, the chaotic school atmosphere is considered normal by students as well as teachers. In those places teachers also feels very helpless and hopeless and they do not know how to deal with the situations. Thus, it seems that the organizational climates are very fundamental if we are going to do deal with this problem. Teachers need to be trained in conflict resolutions, peer mediation and a variety of teaching tools that involve every student.

Besides school climates, external factors are also very effective contributor for these problems. For example, drug and alcohol consumption in society, gang activities, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and poverty are very fundamental factors for young people to learn those adversaries and act on them.

Prevention of bullying is not limited to schools and teachers are not the one only in charge of them. The whole segment of societies are responsible for creating and solving this problem. First, we need very effective teacher training programs, even when they are in college they have to be introduced the violence and bullying problems in schools. Teacher should learn the social-emotional education, the benefit of cooperative learning and conflict resolution techniques.

Secondly, in all level of education teachers and school personal should talk about peer bullying, make it known by students, talk about student code of conducts, and learn the consequences of their vulgar behaviors. Each school system should be able to establish rules with the involvement of their students and enforce enthusiastically those rules. Schools should define more attainable goals for their institutions. By adapting a "zero tolerance policy" they can improve the organizational climate for everyone to the point that learning environments can be both physically and psychologically safe for everyone. This will dramatically increase the sense of belongings and loyalty to the school as well as classmates. Eventually, this will create a greater sense of community which leads greater achievements.

Victim students should be identified and the necessary emotional and social support should be offered to them. They may need individual care, counseling, social skill training, learning to say no, learning to seek help and learn the available resources for help. Research shows that victims are very shy and

socially isolated they do not want to talk about their experience to their parents or teachers. They want to keep confidential. This should not be this way. Teachers and counselor should be available, reachable and approachable. Once the students know that there are being cared they can early talk about their deep-down problems.

Adapting a positive attitude is important in prevention of bullying in schools as such that non-punitive strategies are important, using by reinforcement are effective, increasing the empathy, and creating a caring friendship circulates, utilization of group work or cooperative learning activities will help students to get to know their friends, their social and emotional development would increase and children and adolescents will learn to be together, to love and cherish each other. Those methods are also good for increasing multicultural understanding and finally created a safe and secure environment for everyone.

Establishing a more inclusive partnership with community and family. School administrators and teachers should be in constant contact with parents as well as community leaders and organizations. They can adapt a joint management style in order to overcome the bullying and gang violence and drug problems. Because, family, school, and neighborhoods are small microcosms that affect the bigger macrocosms systems.

One of the other important factors is to increase recreational, art and sport activities that after school hours students can go there, spent time with their friends, enjoy and have a quality of time with their friends. Especially, sport centers, swimming pools, water parks, and art studios are places that both family members and students can have good time. They would love to be with their friends. Similarly, boy scouts and girl scouts are also well-established institutions that has many trained members and staff members. While students are having good time there, they are also learning to get along better, learn new social skills and take more responsibilities for their life.

One of the important things in preparing prevention and intervention programs is that to know your communities "social texture". It is important to know the very fundamental characteristics of your community. Social, cultural and economic advantages and disadvantages, family structure, divorce rates, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol addictions, poverty, the availability of work places and available local and governmental social welfare programs that they can utilize and improve the quality of life themselves and for their children.

Finally, one of the important things is the human factors. The power of teacher's attitude has a very detrimental effect on children and adolescents' life. Teachers are at the same time role model for your students. Therefore, teacher trainings are important, the quality of teachers make difference in their life

and change them in a more positive way. However, teachers themselves are having problems and exposed to school violence and other adversarial. Sometimes their work is not valued, their salary is well below the living standards, socially they are not respected, and all those factors lead to low teaching motivation and indifference. Therefore, improving teachers' status and prestige is imperative if we would expect a caring teaching. This will help the quality of teaching, increase teacher parent communications, creates more tided community that eventually leads more productive results.

It seems that prevention of school violence and bullying is not only school's problem. It has many factors that reciprocally affects each other. We have to take precautions in every segment and every level of education and be mindful all the time, because this will hit us in the end.

## 2. Assistant Professor Dr. Thseen Nazir

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The pervasiveness of bullying in schools is a major concern that needs to be addressed. Bullying culture involves a manifestation of the power dynamics seen in a particular society. Over the years, different forms of bullying have been identified, with the main distinction being between direct and indirect/relational bullying (Arseneault et al., 2010). Duy (2013) has further listed physical bullying, verbal bullying, psychological bullying, and sexual bullying. The digitized world has also seen the rise of a new form of bullying called cyberbullying (Dilmaç & Aydoğan, 2010). Direct bullying involves physical or verbal aggression where the victims are immediately aware of the identity of the bullies, whereas indirect/relational bullying involves concealed efforts at harming someone, such as with the use of threats or negative rumors about the victim (Malik & Mehta, 2016). It is important to note that the visibility of bullying behaviors is important when it comes to identifying them as acts of bullying. A major concern is to see whether children have an appropriate idea of what constitutes bullying and if they can accurately distinguish between bullying and what they consider "friendly teasing" or "forms of punishment." It is pertinent then to understand the factors that play a role in shaping their understanding of the concept and their attitude towards being bullied.

The role that family and school systems play in propagating bullying culture cannot be overlooked. The traditional families try to infuse children with values of patriarchy, an understanding of social hierarchy, obedience to the 'more powerful', and interdependence (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). Authoritarian parenting and violence within the family pave the way for children's understanding that

power can be wielded against the weak and the weak should just suffer in silence (Corvo & deLara, 2010; Campbell et al., 2018). Children born to authoritarian parents often discount their bullying experiences to incidents of mere 'teasing' or 'friendly fighting' (Malik & Mehta, 2016). Parents are also known to teach their children avoidance or assertive behaviors as a way of responding to bullies, which may do more harm than good (Troop-Gordon & Gerardy, 2012). Parents with normative views of bullying or violence can easily shape their children's conception of bullying to mirror their conceptions (Christie-Mizell, 2003; Mishina, 2004; Troop-Gordon & Gerardy, 2012). These children grow up believing that their religion or class provides them with a better social standing than the others, paving the way for a power imbalance upon which bullying culture thrives.

### 2.1 What is considered bullying?

Victimized children often find it hard to have an accurate understanding of what bullying entails. This could be because of the influence of socially propagated ideas about bullying. For example, Relational bullying is usually misidentified and therefore unreported by victimized children. According to a study by Mishna and colleagues (2006) majority of students, and adults alike, are aware that bullying entails a power imbalance and that it is an intentional act of aggression. What most of them are not aware of is that indirect or relational forms of bullying, like social exclusion, or spreading of negative rumors, are also a form of bullying (Mishna, 2004; Nazir, 2019). Social exclusion, which is another widely practiced form of relational bullying (Crick et al., 2006) is also not given as much importance as it should. Instead of reporting these forms of bullying experiences, children would rather suffer in silence to feel included by their peers (Corvo & deLara, 2010). Other bullying forms that children find hard to identify include the usage of corporal punishment in schools.

Sexual bullying is another category that children have a hard time identifying. That bullying can be overtly sexual seems to evade children and their care taker's minds. In this case, as well, children keep away from reporting sexual bullying because of patriarchic undertones in society or the belief that the bullies are just playing around. Nazir (2020) found that among high school children 0.2% of the boys and 0% of the girls from the sample reported being sexually bullied. A hesitation to report, born out of cultural barriers, was revealed to be the reason for such low numbers (Nazir, 2020). Society doesn't hold these bullies accountable for their actions, instead, they expect the victims to go through with the bullying as a part of 'growing up' (Leach & Sitaram, 2007). Parents also discount sexual bullying faced by their children, by making it out to be isolated episodes of playful teasing. They go as far as to say that sexual bullying is a method used by bullies to express

affection towards the victims (Mishna, 2004). Implicit messages such as 'boys will be boys' and prescribed gender norms that necessitate female compliance to a superior male authority are inculcated into the minds of the young victims, who then believe that what is happening to them is okay (Campbell et al., 2018; Chandran et al., 2019).

### 3. Nadire Gülçin Yıldız

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#### 3.1 School and community-based youth mentoring programs for peer bullying intervention

"Neurons that fire together, wire together" (Shatz, 1992). Relationships change the brain. Neurogenesis does occur in the adult human brain. It is known that previous studies of mentoring programs that mentoring can reduce violent and aggressive behavior. In 1995 Big Brothers Big Sisters Impact Study found that mentored youth were one-third less likely to have use aggression toward someone during the study and that they reported more positive interpersonal relationships with their peers. Tolan (2014) designed the most comprehensive study to investigate the link of mentoring and aggression. Findings of the 39 programs analyzed revealed showing the largest effects across programs which were for reducing aggression towards peers.

School and community-based youth mentoring programs for peer bullying intervention is an important issue for examination. Mentoring programs are known to have the potential to facilitate positive peer relationship; therefore, they can be viewed and implemented as school or community-based Peer Bullying Interventions Programs. Typically, mentoring programs pair youth with caring, non-parental adults or sometimes with older peers to promote positive youth development. These programs offer a popular strategy, which is becoming more commonly used, especially as an early intervention for at-risk children and youth. Conversely, to what extent these interventions improve youth outcomes remain an important inquiry. Raposa et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of all outcome studies of intergenerational, one-on-one youth mentoring programs carried between 1975 and 2017, using rigorous inclusion criteria, which align with developmental theories of youth mentoring. Analysis of 70 mentoring outcome studies, with a sample size of 25,286 youth (average age of 12 years old) generated a statistically significant effect of mentoring programs across youth outcomes.

Although there is considerable diversity in the structure and purpose of youth mentoring interventions, effect size in these studies show consistency with past meta-analyses of youth

mentoring. Most programs in mentoring are supported with extensive literature underline the role of intergenerational relationships for promoting positive youth development and preventing a host of social emotional issues, e.g. depression and delinquency (DuBois and Karcher 2013). Present analyses draw from a developmental model of youth mentoring relationships (Rhodes et al. 2002; Rhodes 2005) as a guiding conceptual framework.

Raposa et al. (2019) presented a developmental model which postulates an "interconnected set of three processes (i.e., social emotional, cognitive, and identity formation processes) through which the establishment of close, caring relationships with non-parental adults" are expected to promote positive developmental trajectories (p. 438).

Several meta-analyses have added to our knowledge on the effect of youth mentoring on different outcomes. While some meta-analyses have focused on specific subgroups of youth others focused on particular program models. Meta-analyses with youth at risk for delinquency or aggression showed impacts of mentoring on juvenile reoffending (Cohen's  $d = .21$ ; Jolliffe and Farrington 2007) and delinquency (Cohen's  $d = .23$ ; Tolan et al. 2008). School-based mentoring on three large scale indicated positive effects of mentoring relations on a range of school-related results (Cohen's  $d$  ranging from .07 to .18.; Wheeler et al., 2010).

As an inexpensive intervention, youth mentoring programs are promising for youth who may be at risk for developing psychological, social, and behavioral issues. Positive impact of one-on-one mentoring relationships is underscored in research for children and youth showing externalizing behaviors such as aggression (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007), substance use (Rhodes et al., 2005), and other delinquent behaviors (Tolan et al., 2008). Another study assessed the effect of mentoring relationships on extensive set of youth outcomes, which showed primarily strong effects reducing depressive symptoms (Herrera et al. 2013). The results of youth mentoring programs indicated increased acceptance with youth at-risk for diverse problems (Blakeslee and Keller, 2012). An estimated 2.5 million American children and youth are paired each year through mentoring programs (Raposa et al., 2017).

Discussions related to the effects of youth mentoring are emerging to show their outcome. Before Raposa et al. (2017) stated that previous comprehensive meta-analysis on youth mentoring programs comprised outcome studies through 2010 (Dubois et al., 2011); however, since 2010, there has been a rise in large-scale examinations of mentoring interventions, consistent with the emphasis on evidence-based procedures (e.g., the establishment of a National Mentoring Resource Center for supporting evidence-based mentoring practices).

Overall effects of youth mentoring are promising. Analyzing data from 70 studies on youth mentoring programs have shown that the mean effect of mentoring on youth outcomes was .21. While this effect may be considered small by Cohen's (1988) rules, it is within the moderate range of empirical guidelines for the average effect sizes according to universal youth prevention programs (Tanner-Smith et al., 2018). It should be noted that many of the youth who are engaged in mentoring programs are already experiencing clinical symptoms, presenting greater room for improvement on outcome assessments compared to youth in primary prevention programs (Jarjoura et al., 2018). Comparisons with the somewhat larger effects reported in secondary prevention programs may also be necessary (Durlak and Wells, 1998). The effect size in these studies (ranging from .18 to .21) is surprisingly consistent with past meta-analyses of youth mentoring conducted at a large scale (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011).

The original Adverse Childhood Experiences ACE Study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 with two waves of data collection. Over 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization members from Southern California received physical exams and completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences, their current health status and other behaviors. Felitti et al., (1998)'s article titled "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adult" is probably one of the most cited articles underscored the role of specific childhood adversities.

According to Research Brief Child Trends July 2014 stated that prevalence of 8 ACEs was measured if the child ever:

- Lived with a parent or guardian who got divorced or separated;
- Lived with a parent or guardian who died;
- Lived with a parent or guardian who served time in jail or prison;
- Lived with anyone who was mentally ill or suicidal, or severely depressed for more than a couple of weeks;
- Lived with anyone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs;
- Witnessed a parent, guardian, or other adult in the household behaving violently toward another (e.g., slapping, hitting, kicking, punching, or beating each other up);
- Was ever the victim of violence or witnessed any violence in his or her neighborhood; and
- Experienced economic hardship "somewhat often" or "very often" (i.e., the family found it hard to cover costs of food and housing).

Violence and exposure to violence are related to bullying. Being a victim of violence or witnessing violence predicts psychopathology. Choi et al., (2011) found that reduced fractional anisotropy in the visual limbic pathway of young adults who

witnessed domestic violence during their early years. Tomoda et al. (2012) reported reduced visual cortex and right lingual gyrus gray matter volume in young adults who were exposed to witnessing domestic violence in childhood. Other studies provide evidence that maltreatment is associated with risk for developing pathology. McCrory et al., (2011) found that there is a heightened neural reactivity to threat in child victims who experience violence in the family.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include a) abuse (emotional physical, sexual); b) household challenges (intimate partner violence, substance abuse, mental illness, separation and divorce, incarcerated household member), and c) neglect (emotional and physical), posing social-emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioral risks that can be prevented. *CDC-Kaiser ACE Study is the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and household challenges and later-life health and well-being.* Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction for many of the leading causes of death in adults.

In a dissertation study, Einoff (2005) stated bullying in schools is a pervasive problem that affects large numbers of students each year, and can have serious adverse consequences for everyone in the school environment. Literature on the topic of bullying indicates that peer-based interventions may be an effective tool in overcoming bullying. However, this topic appears somewhat ignored regarding regard to empirical research.

Einoff (2005) study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a peer-implemented anti-bullying curriculum entitled Friends Against Bullying (FAB). It is an original program incorporated several strategies identified in the literature critical for bullying mediation. It is built upon (1) peer-led interventions can be an effective way to fight against bullying and (2) that cognitive dissonance can influence changing behavior. The FAB program consists of six scripted lessons that teach pupils in "identifying bullying, avoiding bullying, standing up to bullying, and helping others who are bullied". In this study, 6th grade students as mentors of the anti-bullying core curriculum, with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students acted as the mentees. Results of self-report data collected before and after the intervention revealed differential changes in self-reported victimization across grade. Einoff (2005)'s study is an evidence-based best practice example for school-based youth mentoring programs for peer bullying intervention.

In 1995, Tierney, Grossman, & Resch designed a study to evaluate the impact of BBBS Mentoring Programs with youths in America. Their sample included 10-16 years old (93% were between ages of 10-14), 60% were boys and more than half minority members (70% were African American). Almost all participants lived with one parent and came from a low-income household with a history of

either family violence or substance abuse. Matching procedures in the mentoring programs they have participated included to integrate features based on backgrounds and stated preferences of mentors, mentees and parents, while also considering geographic proximity. BBBS Mentoring Programs is the oldest, best known, the most sophisticated mentoring program in United States. They are known to scientifically reliable evidence that mentoring programs are very effective with an aim of the research is to determine whether one-to-one mentoring experience made a difference in the lives of youth depending on six basic areas: a) Antisocial activities; b) Academic performance; c) Attitudes and behaviors; d) Relationships with families; e) Relationship with friends; and f) Self-concept / Social and cultural enrichment. In terms of method the study conducted a base-line interview to determine eligibility of the youth for the program. After eligibility analyses those who found to be eligible are randomly assigned to treatment group or control group. Both groups were re-interviewed 18 months later. 959 of the participants were completed both base-line and follow-up interviews. Little brothers and sisters and big brothers and sisters were met for average of almost 12 months with meeting about three times per month lasting about 4 hours each time. Research based on self-report data obtained from baseline and follow-up interviews. Findings showed that mentees were:

- 46% less likely to initiate drug use
- 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use
- 1/3 of them found to be less likely to hit someone.
- More likely to feel competent about doing schoolwork and skipped fewer classes, show modest gains in their grade point average (especially little sisters)
- Quality of relationship with parents and peers were better due to higher level of trust. With a strong effect
  - Higher academic performance
  - Higher self-confidence
  - Higher family functioning

As part of the inclusion criteria children who participated in the program after spending 18 months with a mentor compared to those who did not (7-17 years old, 950 Girls and Boys). Abovementioned studies attenuate that school and community-based youth mentoring programs for peer bullying intervention is effective. In summary, mentoring programs are known to have the potential to facilitate positive peer relationship.

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